



# News Release

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Contacts: [Kate Lynch](#), Communications Office

360-236-4072

## **Hazy days of summer can boost air pollution, health risks for many**

*Ground-level ozone and forest fire smoke are common in summer*

**OLYMPIA** — In Washington, we welcome warm sunny weather, ready to spend more time outdoors in the garden and on hiking trails. Summer is also [wildfire season](#) and a time when [ozone levels](#) rise, making it more difficult to breathe for people with heart and lung diseases.

“It’s important for people who have conditions like asthma, bronchitis, and heart disease to pay attention to air quality reports,” said State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes. “Air pollution makes it hard for everybody to breathe. And poor air quality affects people with heart and lung diseases earlier than others. If you live in an area that has forest fires, make sure to protect yourself from smoky conditions.”

Older adults are vulnerable because they often don’t know they have these diseases. New research suggests that breathing air that has high “particulate” matter, or fine particles, can also be risky for people who are obese or have diabetes. Children are vulnerable to polluted air because their lungs are still growing and they spend more time outdoors.

Different things cause summer air pollution. Several consecutive days of sunny, hot weather will increase ozone. Wildfires like the ones that have broken out in central Washington recently produce smoky air that contains fine particles and toxic chemicals. Cars and trucks generate exhaust. On calm days when the air is still, air pollutants build up. Ongoing climate changes are projected to cause additional bad air quality by increasing wildfires and ozone pollution.

Everyone can lower their exposure to air pollution by checking air quality conditions before taking part in outdoor activities, especially people in high risk groups. When air pollution is high, people should limit outdoor activity and choose less strenuous things to do — such as going for a walk instead of a run. Pollution levels are often highest at midday or in the afternoon, so exercising earlier or later may be wise. Indoor exercise is another option.

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Where vehicle exhaust may be higher, it helps to spend less time in traffic and to avoid exercising near traffic. There are several air quality resources available, including websites and a smartphone app.

Clickable state maps with information about current air quality can be found at the state [Department of Ecology](#) website. [Airwatch NW](#) has information about air quality, burn bans, and tips on clean home heating. The American Lung Association offers [State of the Air](#), a free smartphone app for iPhones and Android with current air quality information. Color-coding ranks air quality from green for “good” to maroon for “hazardous.” Plan outdoor activities when air quality is in the “good” or green zone. People with a lung or heart disease should carry needed medication when air quality is in any zone other than green.

Tips for [protecting yourself from smoke](#), along with air quality and health information can be found on the [Outdoor Air Quality](#) and the [Washington Tracking Network](#) websites.

The [Department of Health website](#) (doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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